Elections and Voting Behavior (PLS 341-01) Winter 2009

Class Location: Our default class location will be Lake Huron Hall (LHH) 121
On some Thursdays, announced in class, we will meet in Henry Hall (HRY) 116

Class Time:
Professor: Whitt Kilburn, Ph.D.
Office: 1121 AuSable Hall
Office Telephone: (616) 331-8831
Email: kilburnw@gvsu.edu

Office Hours:

Course Website: http://faculty.gvsu.edu/kilburnw. I’ll post a link to the website in Blackboard, which we’ll use to record your grades and facilitate communication.

In this course we will focus our study of elections and voting behavior on the central organizing theories that have motivated our discipline’s study of the subject over the past half century. Many of the central insights into voting behavior originate from a book published in 1960, The American Voter. Our class will begin by reading a replication of this work, completed recently to reflect on the extent to which these insights have changed since that time. From there, we will consider a few other key developments and topical concerns in American politics — the growth in income inequality, the persuasive effect of presidential campaigns, and differences in political behavior across the ‘red’, ‘blue’, and ‘purple’ Americas.

Required Course Texts:


Strongly Recommended, but not Required Text:


Optional Course Text:


You’ll want to purchase this book only if you are interested in doing a largely independent, semester long project on regression analysis.
Schedule and Activities

Tuesdays and Thursdays On most class days we will discuss the theories and results from the various readings assigned for the day. A few times during the semester (announced in class) we will adjourn to the lab in MAC for data analysis.

Reading Questions For each class day’s reading assignment, you will be expected to respond to a series of written questions, turning in these questions at the beginning of the class in which the articles are to be read. These questions will be graded pass/fail.

If no questions have been assigned for the day, you will be expected to write your own short reaction to the assigned reading, which should include a) a brief summary of the major points of the reading, and b) two questions about the reading that you would like to raise for class discussion. Your responses to these alternate questions should be no longer than 1 page, single spaced.

Either types of reading questions are due at the beginning of each class period, and must be submitted in hard copy (typed or handwritten).

Research Papers I’ll expect you to write a series of research papers, each written as a synthesis of scholarly literature addressing a research question you identify in one of the “Commentary and Controversy” sections in The American Voter Revisited. (Alternatively, any subject area described, but not explored in detail, in any of our course readings are suitable for these papers.) You’ll write three of these throughout the semester. More information on the papers will be distributed in class.

The essay due dates will vary, depending on your own interests and schedule. I’ll expect you to turn in a paper once every 4-5 weeks. You’ll receive a time table for these papers on the assignment sheet.

As part of your participation in the class, I’ll ask you to share with us the theme of each of your papers; hopefully, you’ll have found one or two provocative questions to share with the class.

For those strongly motivated to do more advanced data analysis, there will be an opportunity to focus the research paper on linear regression analysis. Those students choosing this option will have to meet with me outside of class, and purchase the John Fox book. Unless you consider yourself strongly, independently motivated, I suggest the Research Papers route.

Data Management and Analysis Homework There will be three data analysis homework assignments, due throughout the semester.

General Policies and Procedures

I will hold you accountable to high standards. Beyond that, there are a few key things you should know about my expectations of you:

1. Most important of all, I expect you to be present in class and actively participating. The class suffers when any student routinely skips class or is apathetic about assignments.

2. I do not provide makeup assignments for anything completed within a single class period. Exams must be made up ahead of time.
3. If you are absent from class when an assignment or handout is distributed as homework, it is still your responsibility to turn it in on time. Extra copies of handouts — anything on paper distributed in class — are placed in the box outside my office door. You should also check the course website.

4. All assignments must be submitted via hard copy. I am unable to provide effective evaluations of your work submitted via email, so please do not send assignments to me.

5. I expect all assignments to be turned in on time. Late assignments will never receive full credit, and the late penalty will depend on the assignment and circumstances. So, if you must turn in an assignment late, place a hard copy underneath my office door.

6. Unless asked to do so, please do not use a laptop computer during class, because they co-opt your attention and those of students around you. (If I had my own laptop in front of me while teaching, even I would probably get distracted by it.) I have yet to actually meet a student who really does use one during class exclusively for taking notes. So if you use one, I will assume you are web surfing or reading email.

7. If you believe you will have trouble with the course, I encourage you to call an academic counselor at the Advising Resources and Special Programs Unit, 331-3588.

**Grades**

Data Homework and Reading Questions 20%
Research Papers 60%
(Papers 1, Papers 2, Papers 3)
Final Exam 15%
Participation 10%

Unless standardized scores are necessary (more on that later in class), the course grading scale will be:

- **A** 93-100
- **A-** 90-92
- **B+** 87-89
- **B** 84-86
- **B-** 80-83
- **C+** 76-79
- **C** 72-75
- **C-** 70-72
- **D+** 65-69
- **D** 60-64
- **D-** <60

**HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE**

1. Studiously avoid last-minute preparation and complete all assignments.
2. Attend every class session.
3. Participate regularly in class discussions, demonstrating your mastery of the day’s reading assignments.
4. Talk to me during office hours about any concerns or to clarify expectations.
Schedule

This schedule is tentative. I am a teacher, not a syllabus-schedule-exactor. So you should expect me to make changes to the syllabus given the pace of the course.

Unit 1: Foundations
Jan 6: Course orientation — no reading assignment

Perhaps with the exception of The American Voter, no single piece of scholarship has had a greater influence on the study of electoral behavior than this chapter by Converse. You should read it with care.

Unit 2: Revisiting *The American Voter*
Jan 13: Read *The American Voter Revisited* (TAVR), chapters 1-5
Jan 15: Read TAVR, chapters 6-8

Unit 3: Revisiting *The American Voter*
Jan 20: Read TAVR, chapters 9-12
Jan 22: Read TAVR, chapters 13-14

Unit 4: Revisiting *The American Voter*
Jan 27: Read TAVR, chapters 15, afterword
Jan 29: lab assignment; meet in Henry Hall

Unit 5: *Unequal Democracy*
Feb 3: Read *Unequal Democracy* (UD), chapters 1-2,
Feb 5: Read UD, chapter 3

Unit 6: *Unequal Democracy*
Feb 10: Read UD, chapters 4-6
Feb 12: Read UD, chapters 7-8
Unit 7: *Unequal Democracy*

Feb 17: Read UD, chapters 9-10
Feb 19: lab assignment; meet in Henry Hall

Unit 8: *Red State, Blue State*

Feb 24: Read *Red State, Blue State* (RSBS), chapters 1-3
Feb 26: Read RSBS, chapters 4-5

Unit 9: *Red State, Blue State*

March 10: Read RSBS, chapters 6-8
March 12: Read RSBS, chapters 9-10

Unit 10: *The Persuadable Voter*

March 17: Read *The Persuadable Voter* (TPV), chapters 1-2
March 19: Read TPV, chapters 3-4

Unit 11: *The Persuadable Voter*

March 24: Read TPV, chapters 5-6
March 26: Read TPV, chapter 7

Unit 12: Elections and Voting Behavior, in retrospective

March 31: no reading assigned
April 2: lab assignment; meet in Henry Hall

Units 13-14: Open

April 7-9; April 14-16 flex days; no reading assignment.

**Final Exam**

**When** Wednesday, April 22, 2009 — 4:00pm to 5:50 pm. *You are responsible for verifying the time of the final examination with the Registrar’s calendar.*

**Where** LHH 121